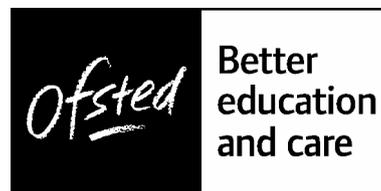


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Mr S Hughes
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15 March 2007

Dear Mr Hughes

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CASTLEWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Anna Dawson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 March 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors visited lessons in each class, examined documents and observed pupils' conduct around the school and at break times. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, staff, pupils and a small number of parents. Discussions also took place with the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

There have been no staffing changes since the last monitoring visit. However, the school is included in a review of primary school places by the LA. This means that consultation is taking place with regard to its amalgamation with a nearby

primary school, or its closure from September 2008. The whole school community is concerned over the uncertainty stemming from this review.

Achievement and standards

There are some signs of improving achievement, particularly at Key Stage 1. Consequently, pupils in the current Year 2 class are on track to reach broadly average standards and reverse last year's dip in assessment results. Although pupils are starting to make up some lost ground at Key Stage 2, progress here is patchier: there is still underachievement and standards are not yet high enough. The school has worked hard to establish procedures for assessing pupils' progress. It is now possible for staff to see at a glance which pupils are doing well and which are lagging behind. Teachers are more skilled at identifying the levels at which pupils are working and pinpointing the next steps for improvement. They are making better use of this information to set challenging targets for pupils and are monitoring progress more closely. This is having a positive impact, particularly in mathematics, reading and science, although this improvement is not showing in raised standards, as yet. Progress is weakest in writing. This is because teachers are less secure at accurately identifying pupils' levels of attainment in this aspect of English and agreeing these as a staff. As a result targets set have not always been matched closely enough to pupils' needs. Measures are currently under way to remedy this through training and support from the LA's advisers. Strategies recently put into place, such as the use of 'talking partners' and drama techniques, are improving progress in writing lessons. However, there is still significantly more to be done to ensure all pupils are working at the right level and are effectively challenged and supported. In science, progress is accelerating faster as a result of the focus on investigation skills, more rigorous assessment and high quality input into teaching from the LA's consultants.

Programmes to support those pupils who find learning difficult in mathematics and English are working well at Key Stage 1. However, support for lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 2 is not as consistent in quality or as well organised. Consequently, progress remains slower for these pupils. In contrast, the school's drive to accelerate the progress of more able pupils is paying off. This is most evident in mathematics in Year 6, where these pupils are benefiting from being taught as a discrete group.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes to learning and their good behaviour continue to be strengths. Pupils enjoy school and remark that their lessons are becoming more interesting

and enjoyable. They work well together and support each other with learning. They relish being rewarded when they do well. Most concentrate well in lessons. However, a few older pupils find it difficult to stay on task if teaching does not fully engage them. Pupils' attendance remains satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is improving steadily. There were more examples of good teaching seen than at the last visit, although there are still inconsistencies to be ironed out at Key Stage 2. Teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Their planning is thorough and takes greater account of the different levels of ability within the class. This is providing a better level of challenge for the more able pupils and those of average ability. As a result, their progress is starting to accelerate. However, there is still some way to go to ensure that lower attaining pupils are appropriately challenged and supported in all lessons. On some occasions the work they are given is still too hard for them to carry out without adult support, even though it has been adapted. On other occasions they are not provided with the best resources to enable them to carry out tasks independently. This limits their progress.

Most lessons get off to a positive start, with the expectations for learning shared with the pupils. This ensures that pupils know what they are aiming for and regular reminders keep them on track. In many lessons pupils are involved in evaluating their own progress, which deepens their understanding of how well they are doing. Teachers also use time at the end of lessons effectively, for example, to check on how well pupils have understood key concepts, to correct any misconceptions and to celebrate success. The information gained is then used to adjust planning for next time. These features are improving learning. The best lessons are well paced and involve pupils in practical tasks that stimulate their interest and fully engage them. In weaker lessons the pace is slower and activities are uninspiring. Consequently, learning is not as sharply focused, some pupils become restless and progress dips.

Most teachers are making better use of assessment information to set targets for pupils. Pupils know their targets and teachers are helping them to understand what they need to do to achieve them. Pupils make good use of the 'learning walls' in each classroom, where targets are displayed for them to check on how well they are doing and to remind themselves of what they have achieved. Good quality marking, particularly in English, relates well to the targets set and is increasing pupils' understanding of how they can improve.

Teaching assistants are involved in planning and evaluating pupils' progress, so that they know what they are trying to achieve with the pupils. Most have received training, which has increased their understanding of how they can best support learning. However, they are not always deployed to best effect across the school or by teachers in individual classes. The curriculum, and care, guidance and support remain satisfactory. Support and academic guidance are

improving, as the measures to check on progress are beginning to take effect. Most noteworthy here is the information the school provides for parents to help them understand their children's targets and how they can best support them in achieving these.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Ensure the quality of teaching, pace of learning and expectations of what children in Key Stage 2 can achieve are consistently good enough to enable children to perform their best – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have increased the focus on raising standards and are improving the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have ensured that staff morale remains high, despite the challenges the school faces with regard to reorganisation of school places in the local area. Good teamwork is evident and staff work very hard together to bring about and sustain improvements. Parents are strong in their support. These are key features in the steady progress the school is making. Good use continues to be made of the substantial and effective support provided by the LA. However, the senior management team is taking a greater lead in instigating and developing strategies to move the school forward. A good example of this is the cycle of monitoring that has been established, in order to ensure that the work of the school is evaluated more thoroughly and rigorously. This programme is allowing the school to identify more precisely what it does well and where further improvements need to be made. It is also enabling the school to make decisions about where to place its energies next. For example, senior managers have identified the good practice in teaching within the school. They are starting to plan ways in which this can be shared to best effect. However, the impact of the support provided for lower attaining pupils has not been evaluated, so the school does not have a clear enough idea of how effective it is. Strategies to support these pupils are not robust enough to tackle their underachievement or to ensure that these pupils do not become disaffected learners.

Subject leaders in English and mathematics are taking an increasing lead in school improvement. They are involved in checking on teaching and learning and in supporting, guiding and challenging colleagues to improve their practice. The impact of their work is clear in the improvements in teaching and learning. They attribute this directly to the analysis of pupils' work and the lesson observations they carry out, which help them identify key aspects to work on. A senior manager has worked alongside them, with the support of the LA's consultants, until they were confident enough to take up the reins themselves. This has proved to be a good model and is beginning to be used more widely to develop the skills of others.

The development plans that underpin the work of the school still do not identify clearly enough how actions taken will raise pupils' standards and achievement. Timescales for bringing about improvement are not yet tight enough. Consequently, it is harder for school leaders and governors to keep track of the rate of progress and accurately measure success.

The governing body continues to improve. It is taking a more strategic role in shaping the direction of the school. Governors provide high quality support and are becoming increasingly proactive in holding school leaders to account.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Improve the leadership and management of the school and develop rigorous system of self-evaluation – satisfactory.

External support

The LA has continued to provide high quality support to the school through the work of the school's contact officer and various consultants. This support meets the needs of the school very well and is greatly appreciated by staff, the governing body and school leaders.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, with prior consultation.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 2 are more effectively supported in order to improve their rate of progress.
- Share examples of good practice in teaching more widely throughout the school.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Wirral.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Traves
Additional Inspector